

A CHINESE BELIEF REGARDING PHYLLOCACTUS HOOKERI, WALP.

It is not possible that *Phyllocactus Hookeri*, a Brazilian member of the Cactus family, can be a plant which was treasured in China in the time of the Sung Dynasty (960 to 1278 A. D.); but from information very kindly supplied to the Gardens by Mr. Tan Tang Niah, J. P., President of the Chong Cheng School in Singapore, it seems that in his native Amoy it is now identified with the "Kheng-fa" plant of the Chinese classics.

"The Kheng-fa was held a very precious plant in the time of the Sung dynasty, and there was known but a single individual of it which grew in the Hau-tho-chhi temple in Yang-chow, where, they said, it had been planted during the Tang dynasty (618 to 954 A. D.). Its leaves were by report tender and smooth, with a shining brightness, and its petals thick and pale yellow. Its fragrance was exceptionally sweet. This treasure the emperor Yan-chung, of the Sung dynasty, removed to his forbidden garden, where after a year it showed symptoms of death: but when it was taken back to Yang-chow it revived. Finally during the Chi-yuan years of the Yuan dynasty which followed the Sung dynasty it withered and died. A priest Kam-yu-sui planted in its place a Chu-pat-sin plant; and so during this dynasty what was known as the Kheng-fa was in truth the Chu-pat-sin."

Now, let it be remarked that at the end of the Sung dynasty the chief occupation of the Taoist priesthood in China was a search for medicinal herbs which would bestow immortality: and it is reasonable to consider the above story as connected therewith.

Mr. Tan Tang Niah flowered the plant of *Phyllocactus Hookeri* that he had received from Amoy, in May 1922. Since then others have obtained *Phyllocactus* plants in Singapore, who offer the flowers as a drug of immense value. In their belief of its value is probably another echo of the long-ago search for a drug bestowing immortality.

A medicinal value of any kind however is extremely questionable; and the repute of it rests in all probability on no more than the plant's slow growth.

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CLEOME CHELIDONII. LINN. F., IN THE MALAY PENINSULA.

In the larger towns of the Malay Peninsula Chinese are to be found who prescribe various fresh herbs to such sick as may consult them; and recently in the shop of one of these in Penang two species of *Cleome* were detected by Mr. Mohamed Haniff, the owner distinguishing them as "lek tau chhau" and "it tau chhau." The first proved to be *Cleome viscosa*, a plant whose virtues are known in the East. The other proved to be *Cleome chelidonii*;